

The following letter from Secretary Margaret Spellings to Senator Mike Enzi, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions regarding Carl Perkins reauthorization is posted in the March 10, 2005 Congressional Record.

[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/  
getpage.cgi?position=all&page=S2449&dbname=2005\\_record](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getpage.cgi?position=all&page=S2449&dbname=2005_record)

The same letter was sent to Representative John Boehner, Chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce regarding H.R. 366, which is the House of Representatives Carl Perkins reauthorization legislation.



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

March 9, 2005

Honorable Michael B. Enzi  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,  
and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to S. 250, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2005, which would reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 (Perkins Act). The Perkins Act is currently the primary Federal funding source for educational programs in high schools. Unfortunately, in its current form, the bill does little to address the urgent challenge that has been highlighted by both President Bush and the nation's governors to reform our nation's high schools.

Given the changing dynamic of the workforce, all students, including those in vocational and technical education programs, need to complete high school with a high level of academic skills and be prepared to participate in the globally competitive workforce. Unfortunately, recent results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) demonstrate that, while achievement for our Nation's fourth- and eighth-graders is on the rise, scores for twelfth-graders have declined in both reading and mathematics. Currently just 68 out of every 100 ninth-graders will graduate from high school on time, and two-thirds of students leave high school without the skills to succeed in college. Clearly, our high schools are not getting the job done for America's students. With governors and educators just beginning to consider various reform options, the President's High School Initiative is essential to foster nationwide efforts to transform our high schools.

As you are aware, the President's fiscal year 2006 budget request proposed to eliminate funding for the Vocational Education State Grants and National programs, authorized by the Perkins Act. Career and technical education programs, at their best, can provide students with both strong academic and advanced technical skills, in a "real-world" context that can hold up against the best schools and colleges, both in the United States and internationally. However, under the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process, the Vocational Education State Grants program, by far the largest component of the Perkins Act, was rated ineffective because it has produced little evidence of improved outcomes for students despite decades of Federal investment. On the most recent NAEP

assessments, less than 10 percent of vocational students scored at or above proficiency in mathematics (2000) and only 29 percent scored at or above proficiency in reading (1998). In its final report to Congress in June 2004, the National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE) found no evidence that high school vocational courses themselves contribute to academic achievement or college enrollment. Also, the NAVE did find that high school students, on average, earn more credits in vocational education (4.2) than in math (3.5) or science (3.2). In addition, the most telling data come from employers -- according to a February 2005 Achieve, Inc. survey, employers estimate that 39 percent of high school graduates who have no further education are not prepared for their current job and 45 percent are unprepared for advancement.

As a result of these findings, and the widely recognized need for a more comprehensive approach to the improvement of high school education, the President instead proposes that these funds be redirected to support a new High School Initiative to improve achievement and narrow achievement gaps at the high school level. This proposed initiative will give educators greater flexibility to design and implement programs that best meet the needs of all students, including career and technical education students. The fiscal year 2006 budget also includes funds to improve access to community colleges and to expand the training programs administered by those institutions.

Enactment of S. 250 in its current form would continue to reauthorize, with little change, the very programs that have been ineffective in improving the quality of education of our Nation's career and technical education students. It would be irresponsible to continue an investment in a program that does not improve the education of students at the high school level.

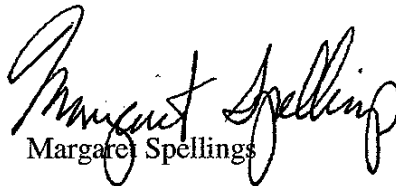
The Perkins Act requires fundamental changes to its mission and focus. While the Administration still supports a redirection of Perkins funds, any extension of the Perkins Act should, at the very least:

- Promote a stronger academic foundation by ensuring that all career and technical education (CTE) students receiving services under the Perkins Act have access to a rigorous academic curriculum to prepare them to enter college or the workforce. CTE students should have a smooth transition to a postsecondary education program leading to a technical certificate, an associate or baccalaureate degree, an apprenticeship, or a job. This change will support the findings of the American Diploma Project, which concluded, "successful preparation for both postsecondary education and employment requires learning the same rigorous English and mathematics content and skills. No longer do students planning to go to work after high school need a different and less rigorous curriculum than those planning to go to college."

- Require that, by school year 2009-2010, students participating in Perkins Act programs be tested annually in three high school grades in reading/language arts and math in order to assess their progress in meeting State standards. The President's FY 2006 budget proposed funding for high school assessments so that principals and teachers have new tools and data to meet the needs of individual students and strengthen high school accountability.
- Give the Secretary adequate authority to establish common measures to assess program performance and to ensure that data provided by the States are valid and reliable. In the bill's current form, State performance measures would not have to be valid or reliable indicators of what they purport to measure. It is thus inequitable to sanction eligible recipients, as the bill allows, for failure to meet performance levels if the performance measures themselves do not meet basic standards of validity and reliability.
- Provide the Secretary authority to negotiate specific performance measures and targets, in percentage form, with each State. Currently, the bill would permit States to continue using previously developed performance measures and would limit the role of the Secretary to reaching agreement on the percentage or numbers of students who attain the State-adjusted levels of performance.

The Office of Management and Budget advises that there is no objection to the submission of this report.

Sincerely,

  
Margaret Spellings